Pandanus Periodical

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What Is Development?

By Larry Traub

Traditionally, most people associate "development" with "money." The terms are not necessarily synonymous. There are too many nations in the world, both developed and developing, in which money has not helped the quality of the lives of the people and in many instances has created situations that contribute to making life more difficult.

Development is not money. Development relates to the quality of life. If, after "development" has occurred, the people whom development is meant to serve are less happy with their situation, then it would be hard to call that process development.

How do people measure or view development? Usually in the form of money expended or revenue earned. Mostly one hears reference to any development project by its price. "A new water project was opened today at Turiak Village at a cost of $300,000." Let's take another look . . .

In most poor nations, development occurs from the top down. An advisor or expert will visit a rural village and say, "this is a wonderful place for growing oranges. If you work hard at growing oranges here you will earn a lot of money and your problems will be solved." This seems quite reasonable and after all, why else would they call him "expert"? Assuming that the village leaders go along with this proposition (which again is quite reasonable in that proceeding with the project will solve the village's problems), the following scenario is not unrepresentative of what can happen:

The village has a population of 95, most of whom are subsistence farmers. The little cash that they earn comes solely from copra. The advisor asks for the names of people who have had experience in agriculture and training in an agricultural program. Three or four young men are chosen to manage the new project who have similar experience. There are a fair number of orange trees in production already from an earlier abandoned plantation, and new trees are planted. Previously the oranges were consumed locally and the excess would fall to the ground and rot. Now, the oranges are boxed and shipped to the capital city and will be used for export as production increases . . .

It still sounds like a good story. After the first few shipments to the city, money starts flowing into the village to the four young managers. They, in turn, pay some of the local people for picking the oranges. The managers are now earning ten times the average wage of those in the village who earn money from cutting copra. Here's where the story sometimes turns nasty. The structure of the village begins to change. The villagers unpreparedness for the change often brings mistrust and jealousy, which is then taken out on the managers. The managers, although they are earning a lot of money and now have a fair amount of power are not very happy. The chiefs are not happy because the young men are now challenging their authority, whether intentionally or not. The villagers are not happy because now a few men are earning a lot of money but most men are in the same situation as before. Only the store owner might be happy because there are not many items to spend money on outside of his store and now he's selling a lot of European cigarettes, beer and tin fish. And the suppliers of imported goods, whether it be United States, Australia, New Zealand or Japan are very happy because production is good and development is good and after all, the village people are now developing their economy.

In most nations development occurs from the top down, which means that the recipients of the development project are often just that – recipients.

Does this mean that development is inherently bad? No, that is as simplistic as the notion that development is good. If, however, development is meant to improve the quality of life of the people, then *that* must be the primary measurement of the development program and its individual component projects. Who determines what is good development? Unfortunately, in most nations

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development occurs from the top down, which means that the recipients of the development project are often just that - recipients. They play little if any part in the development of the project, and when the project is "given" to them, they feel little ownership. They are also often burdened with the recurrent responsibility of a situation that they are not prepared to handle.

How do people measure or view development? Usually in the form of money expended or revenue earned.

Another example might be the $300,000 water supply project that was mentioned earlier. The government and the the overseas aid agency consider the project an overwhelming success as the project brings piped water into the house of every villager. At first, the villagers may feel the same way. Who, however, pays to repair the diesel pumps that run the system? And who can repair it, pay for needed parts, etc. How long will it take to have the water run again? Perhaps if the village knew the alternatives they might have chosen a water supply that was not quite so "advanced" but would have had hardly any recurrent costs and would not have needed an engineering degree to operate.

What other dangers exist in the unclear arena of development? Certainly the problem of dependence. In an interdependent world all nations must rely on each other. Some forms of development, however, are certainly more binding that others. It is not difficult to find examples of this in the Pacific.

Where then is the road out? Can those Pacific nations that have already bound themselves to untenable agreements find viable alternatives that will yet ensure their economic viability? And can there be internal alternatives that will meet the needs of the rural peoples in a manner that relates to them economically as well as socially and culturally? Are there ways for the rural peoples to reap the benefits of economic development in a manner fitting to them?

The next part of this series will take a look at one agency in Vanuatu and how it is approaching development from the bottom up.

In the next issue:
"Development in Vanuatu: From the Bottom Up."

For the past two years, Larry Traub, the former Director of the Friends World College North American Center, was advisor to the Nasonal Komuniti Developmen Trust, Vanuatu's only indigenous Non-Governmental Organization supporting grassroots rural development throughout the Republic. He is currently an independent consultant based in New York.

Vanuatu: The Road to Self Reliance

Barak Sope, Vanuatu's roving ambassador and a Member of Parliament, played a key role in leading his country to independence. He was the first ni-Vanuatu graduate from the University of the South Pacific in Fiji. Returning home in 1973, he turned down many job offers that would have placed him in the colonial administration.

Instead he became the New Hebrides National Party General Secretary: a position that put him in the forefront of the drive for independence. The National Party became the Vanuaaku ("Our Land") Pati in 1977, and at its Congresses, representing chiefs, women, and youths from all the islands, in both 1979 and 1981 he was reelected as Pati General Secretary.

He has been and continues to be a strong advocate of decolonization and self-reliance. As Pati general secretary he has helped to organize programs on political education, rural development and national unity throughout Vanuatu.

Pacific: Ambassador Sope, what has your two-year-old government done to get its feet on the ground economically?

Sope: We have a political party which is the government—the Vanuaaku Pati—and it has set a target for economic independence in the next 10 years. First, we want to put more development in the rural areas. Secondly, we would like to have very strong ni-Vanuatu participation in whatever we do. We will go into cottage industries, but in a very small way, because we feel that agriculture is our main area of focus.

We also have agreements with the French and British governments to explore our waters and our bigger islands for minerals. But economic activity is mainly based on agriculture. Our aim for the next 10 years is to become financially independent, meaning that we don't want to get any more financial aid for our budget from France or Britain.

We are fortunate in having a small population—120,000. There is so much land. We only want a bit more development so we can maintain a reasonable standard of living without destroying our society's fabric.

This in many ways has made us begin to re-think the types of development we want. There is development now in some other Pacific countries where you get foreign investors to develop the country. But really, they are coming in to make money.

So we have to make our decisions carefully.

We are very much questioning the bringing in of foreign investors. They have capital, but we also can get capital. Why cannot a ni-Vanuatu get a million dollars to build something instead of getting someone from outside to do it?

What we need is capital. We think that by pushing our own people to do something, that is our best investment. That will build the economy.

Pacific: How dependent on foreign aid is Vanuatu at this point?

Sope: I would say we are still 60% dependent.

Pacific: Are there certain aspects of tourism that you hope to avoid as it is developed in Vanuatu?

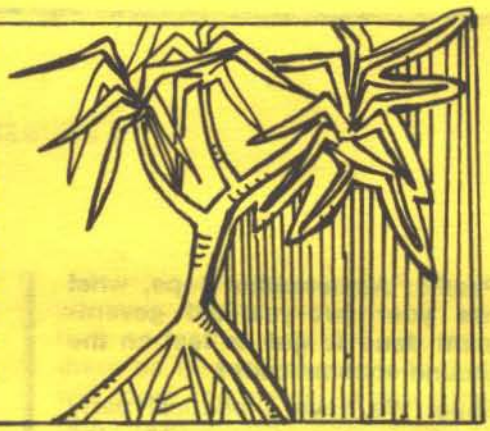
Sope: The first point is that we don't want mass tourism. We don't want these package tours. What I mean by mass tourism is that just anybody comes. We want to be a bit more selective, because we feel that our first aim is to help our people.

Of course, we've seen some of the countries which are going all out for tourism. There are villages that would never get a tar-sealed road to them for the next 10 or 100 years. But if there are hotels there, suddenly the villages have the roads. Really, they're not for the village people. They're for the hotel, for the tourists. We don't see things that way.

That's why we'd like to see tourism as part of the economic development of the country. For example, at the moment the government does not allow tourists to go any place they choose in Vanuatu. We've chosen three islands—Efate, Santo, and Tanna. Those are the islands where you have airplane flights, where the roads are good, and with several hotels where the people can stay. On the other islands, there is no place for the tourists to sleep, no facilities.

Excerpted from an interview with Barak Sope, in *Pacific Magazine*, May/June, 1982.

Pandanus, a fruit plant which has many uses, including use for food, building materials and handicrafts, symbolizes the self-reliance of Pacific people. **Pandanus Periodical** will provide news and views on economic, energy, environmental and political ideas and alternatives that are being used in different Pacific Islands. **Pandanus Periodical** hopes to stimulate discussion in Micronesia and other parts of the Pacific.



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Good Life or Life of Goods?

by George Kent

Soon after World War II, development efforts focused on the achievement of rapid economic growth. The motivation for striving for economic growth was not originally to alleviate poverty, but rather to achieve rapid industrialization.

The idea that economic growth ought to be pursued chiefly for the purpose of reducing poverty did not arise until later, and did not reach its height until the 1970s...

Thinking on development evolved through the 1970s, but the emphasis remained on the material aspects of development, on life support systems rather than life itself. Everyone knew there were other non-material dimensions of development of greater importance, but hardly anyone could come to grips with them.

There are a few, however, like Paulo Freire and Johan Galtung, who came to argue that development should be understood as involving a transformation of consciousness. Specifically, the development of individuals and communities involves their changing from seeing themselves as victims of circumstances to seeing themselves as somehow in control of their own worlds...

While specific standardized outcomes of development should not be prescribed, it is useful to suggest how development might be understood in terms of process. I support the formulation, proposed by Frances Moore Lappe and Joe Collins in *Food First*, that "development is the process of people taking charge of their lives."

To develop is to gain increasing power to define, to analyze, and to solve one's own problems. To develop means to gain power, not necessarily over others, but over oneself, and with others.

Development does mean growth, but not in the simplistic sense that some index becomes larger. A nation does not become increasingly developed just because its GNP grows, any more than a child can be said to be developing simply because he or she grows taller. Rather, development means growth in the sense of transcending limits. To develop is to be able to do something tomorrow that you were not able to do yesterday.

The proper test of any development program, any assistance program, any welfare program, even any educational program, then, is whether it is strengthening or weakening: A people's obtaining revenue from licensing others to fish or mine or log its resources is not development, but learning to fish or mine or log is. Following other people's plans does not constitute development, but formulating one's own plans does. If economic growth is achieved at the price of subordinating one's interests to those of outside investors or trading partners, that growth may work against true development.

Excerpted from *Pacific Magazine*, November/December, 1981.

LET US HEAR FROM YOU.

We welcome our reader's response to issues raised in the **Pandanus Periodical.** What issues would you like to see discussed in future issues of the newsletter? Are you interested in contributing an article, photographs or graphics for publication in **Pandanus Periodical**? Write and let us know.

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